

PLATE XX.—THE WOTTON OAK.

THIS Tree is in the park of Wotton, under Bernwood, a seat belonging to his Grace the Duke of Buckingham. It measures twenty-five feet in circumference, at one foot from the ground, and at the height of twelve feet divides into four large limbs, the principal of which is fifteen feet in circumference. It rises to the height of about ninety feet, and covers an area of fifty yards in diameter with its branches, recalling to the mind of the spectator Virgil's magnificent description of a similar object:

—que, quantum vertice ad auras
Ætherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit.
Ergo non hyemes illam, non flabra, neque imbres
Convellunt: immota manet, multosque nepotes,
Multa virum volvens durando sæcula vincit.
Tum fortes late ramos et brachia tendens
Huc illuc, media ipsa ingentem sustinet umbram.

—whose roots descend
As low towards Pluto's realms, as high in air
Its massive branches rise. The utmost rage
Of wintry storms howls o'er its strength in vain.
Successive generations of mankind,
Revolving ages, flourish and decay,
Yet still immovable it stands, and throws
Its vigorous limbs around, and proudly bears
With firm and solid trunk its stately form,
A mighty canopy of thickest shade.

VIRGIL, Georg. II. 291.

PLATE XXI.—THE YEW TREES AT FOUNTAINS' ABBEY

THESE remarkable Yew Trees stand on a small eminence at Studley Royal, near Ripon, overlooking the ruins of Fountains' Abbey, which celebrated monastery was founded about the end of the year 1192, by Thurstan, Archbishop of York, for certain Monks whose consciences being too tender to allow them to indulge in the relaxed habits of their own order, made them desirous of following the more rigorous rule of the Cistercians' founded by the celebrated Saint Bernard, and then lately introduced into England. Of the origin of Fountains' Abbey, as the date of these Yew Trees is particularly connected with it, the following account from Burton may not be deemed unacceptable:

"At Christmas, the Archbishop, being at Ripon, assigned to the Monks some land in the patrimony of St. Peter, about three miles west of that place, for the erecting of a monastery. The spot of ground had never been inhabited, unless by wild beasts, being overgrown with wood and brambles, lying between two steep hills and rocks, covered with wood on all sides, more proper for a retreat for wild beasts than for the human species. This was called Skeldale, that is, the Vale of Skell, a rivulet running through it from the west to the eastward part of it. The Archbishop also gave to them a neighbouring village called Sutton. Richard, the Prior of St. Mary's, at York, was chosen Abbot by the Monks, being the first of this monastery of Fountains; with whom they withdrew into this uncouth desert, without any house to shelter them in that winter season, or provisions to subsist on, but entirely depending on Divine Providence. There stood a large Elm in the midst of the vale, on which they put some thatch or straw, and under that they lay, eat, and prayed; the Bishop for a time supplying them with bread, and the rivulet with drink. Part of the day some spent in making wattles to erect a little oratory, whilst others cleared some ground to make a little garden. But it is supposed that they soon changed the shelter of their Elm for that of seven Yew Trees growing on the declivity of the hill on the south side of the abbey, all standing at this present time, except the largest, which was blown down about the middle of the last century. They are of an extraordinary size; the trunk of one of them is twenty-six feet six inches in circumference, at the height of three feet from the ground, and they stand so near each other as to form a cover almost equal to a thatched roof. Under these trees, we are told by tradition, the monks resided till they built the monastery; which seems to be very probable, if we consider how little a Yew Tree increases in a year, and to what a bulk these are grown. And as the hill side was covered with wood, which is now almost all cut down, except these trees, it seems as if they were left standing to perpetuate the memory of the monks' habitation there during the first winter of their residence."